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HUSBAND'S INVOLVEMENT IN HOUSEWORK: THE EFFECTS OF RELATIVE EARNING POWER AND MASCULINE ORIENTATION

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ABSTRACT

A survey of 138 husbands in dual-career households examined factors influencing participation in household tasks, i.e., cleaning and cooking. A path analysis found that husbands were more involved in these tasks if they had a non-traditional view of masculinity and if they perceived little conflict between their work and family life. Also, the greater the wife's contribution to family income, the greater the husband's participation in cleaning and cooking tasks. Finally, a traditional view of masculinity tended to decrease involvement in household tasks by virtue of increasing the perception of conflict between work and home life.

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INTRODUCTION

One of the very notable social changes occurring in the twentieth century has been the increasing involvement of women in work outside the home. Traditional family roles in which women were limited to childcare and homemaking activities, while men were the chief source of income outside the home, are clearly breaking down. It has been estimated that fully 50% of married women work outside the home on a part-time or full-time basis (Waite, 1981). Because outside work competes with the amount of time a women can afford to devote to household chores, it is not surprising to find that employed wives spend less time doing family tasks and their husbands pick up the slack by spending more time at these tasks (Epstein, 1971; Holmstrom, 1973). Indeed, in many dual-career families, there is a strong tendency for an equal sharing among men and women of both childcare and housekeeping responsibilities (Peck and Rustad, 1981). However, not all husbands are the same in doing a portion of the work at home, even when their wives engage in full-time employment. In recent years a substantial literature has developed, seeking to identify characteristics of "helpful" versus "non-helpful" husbands. The present study focuses on two of these factors: (1) The sex role orientation of the husband; (2) the earning power of the employed wife.

Pleck (1978) was one of the earliest observers of family relations to identify the important role that a husband's view of "proper" masculine behavior may play in influencing his participation in a wide range of family activities. Thus, husbands who are involved in childrearing tend to have less stereotypic ideas about manliness (Keshet and Rosenthal, 1978; Baruch and Burnett, 1981). That is, men with a non-traditional masculine self-image that provides for

expressiveness, sensitivity to others' needs, and a willingness to perform feminine tasks, such as changing diapers or cleaning toilets, tend to be actively involved in taking care of their children. Other studies (Stafford et al., 1977; Perrucci et al., 1978; Scanzoni, 1978; Bird et al., 1984) appear to support the contention that a non-traditional sex role orientation leads to a more egalitarian division of labor, with a sharing of sex-typed household tasks by both sexes. Further evidence indicates that traditionally-oriented husbands participate less in all household activities (Stafford et al., 1977; Perrucci et al., 1978). One recent study, however, indicates that the predictive power of husband's sex role attitudes and masculinity may be weak when compared to other factors, such as amount of time a husband spends at work, relative to time spent at work by his wife, and perceived skill at doing different household tasks (Atkinson and Huston, 1984). The conclusion from this article is that a husband may have the best of intentions and the proper liberated perspective; however, if his time on the job outside the home is more substantial than his spouse's, or he feels inept at housework, his participation in female-typed chores will be lessened.

Building on the Atkinson finding, it stands to reason that if time spent on the job is important, then the value of that job, expressed in terms of money earned, may also be important in determining participation in housework. A husband, for example, who earns more of the household income that does his wife may be seen as "more important" and exempted from household chores. In terms of distributive justice, the wife who earns less at work must compensate by doing more at home. Also, from the perspective of economic power, the spouse who is the superior earner may be able to command greater household participation from the other spouse. A number of studies support this (Michael, 1967; Lupri, 1969). Thus, a wife's earnings have been shown to be directly proportional to

the number of minutes of housework engaged in by a husband (Nickols and Metzen, 1978). Greater female income is associated with greater husband participation in female activities, e.g., cooking and dishwashing (Scanzoni, 1978). Finally, it appears that it is relative income rather than absolute number of dollars earned by a wife that affects male participation (Model, 1981; Maret and Finalay, 1984).

The present study will look at the two factors -- masculinity and wife's relative income -- in combination as they might affect a husband's involvement in two specific feminine-typed activities: cooking and cleaning. The hypotheses are that men will engage in these activities more if they have a less traditional view of masculinity and if their wife's earnings represent a relatively high proportion of total family income. Also, it is hypothesized that the perceived conflict between work and homelife may be an important mediating factor in a husband's involvement. Husbands who feel that work creates conflicting demands may feel they lack the obligation, time, or energy to do housework.

METHOD

The Sample. Each year the Population Research Laboratory of the University of Alberta conducts a city-wide survey of Edmonton, Alberta. In 1980 this Edmonton Area Survey was comprised of intensive face-to-face interviews with 428 men and women. A random sample of addresses was selected from a computerized list of householders compiled by the City of Edmonton. Persons eligible for the survey were residents at the selected addresses who were 17 years of age or over. A comparison of this survey with current census standards revealed a high degree of representativeness.

This particular article focuses on the responses of 138 husbands taken from the larger sample who met the following criteria:

(1) They were married and living with their spouse at the time;

(2) both they and their spouse were employed in some capacity;

(3) they provided complete and usuable responses to all of the variables examind in this study.

Participation in Housework. Two items from the Survey have been analyzed as indicators of participation in housework. The first question asked, "How often do you take care of the meals, such as cooking, setting the table, and doing the dishes?" Seven responses were available: Daily or almost daily; several times a week; once a week; several times a month; once a month; once or sevral times in the past 12 months; never in the past 12 months. The second question asked, "How often do you take care of the cleaning, such as sweeping, vacuuming, dusting and laundry?" The same response categories were provided.

Conflict of Work and Home Life. To measure this concept, respondents were asked, "How difficult is it to coordinate your work life and your home life?" Seven response categories were available, ranging from Not Very Difficult (1) to Very Difficult (7).

Measures of Sex Role Orientation. Two dimensions of masculine sex role orientation were examined in this study. These dimensions were empirically derived in previous research (Harrell, 1981) through a factor analysis of a number of items dealing with male sex role orientation. A principal components factor analysis revealed two major factors accounting for the majority of the variance. A varimax orthogonal rotation was performed on the original factor matrix. Indices were constructed from this analysis by adding together the scale scores of items with loadings of 0.60 or greater. Each item was responded to in terms of a seven interval scale, ranging from a strongly agree value to strongly disagree. Four items makeup the first factor index, and three items are found in the second index. The first factor, termed the "traditional

masculinity' factor, is represented by items: (1) A husband should be entirely responsible for earning the living for a family; (2) It is more important that a husband is ambitious than that he is kind andunderstanding; (3) The man should take the initiative in expressing physical affection; (4) Men who don't like competitive sports, such as football or hockey, are lacking in masculinity. The second factor measures 'liberated masculinity' with the items: (1) Men shouldn't be ashamed of crying in front of others; (2) It is okay for men to show physical affection towards other men, such as hugging them; (3) In a marriage, it is just as much a man's responsibility as it is a woman's to care for children.

Relative Earnings. Relative income was calculated as the wife's estimated annual income divided by the sum of the wife's and husband's incomes.

Analysis. Multiple regression techniques have been used to test the adequacy of the path model shown in Figure 1. This statistical approach was taken in that the literature suggested that the perceived competition between home and work environments might be critical in mediating such factors as sex role orientation and relative income. Furthermore, regression techniques are able to document the relative predictive power of these different factors.

RESULTS

Figure 2 shows the 'trimmed' path model for the two measures of husband's involvement in domestic chores. Only path coefficients with an absolute value of 0.10 or better and statistically significant at least the 0.5 level have been retained. The goodness of fit of this model was assessed by comparing the observed correlatiosn between variables in Figure 1 with the estimated correlations derived from the significant direct and indirect paths. In all cases, the differences between observed and estimated correlations were minor and less than or equal to .05.

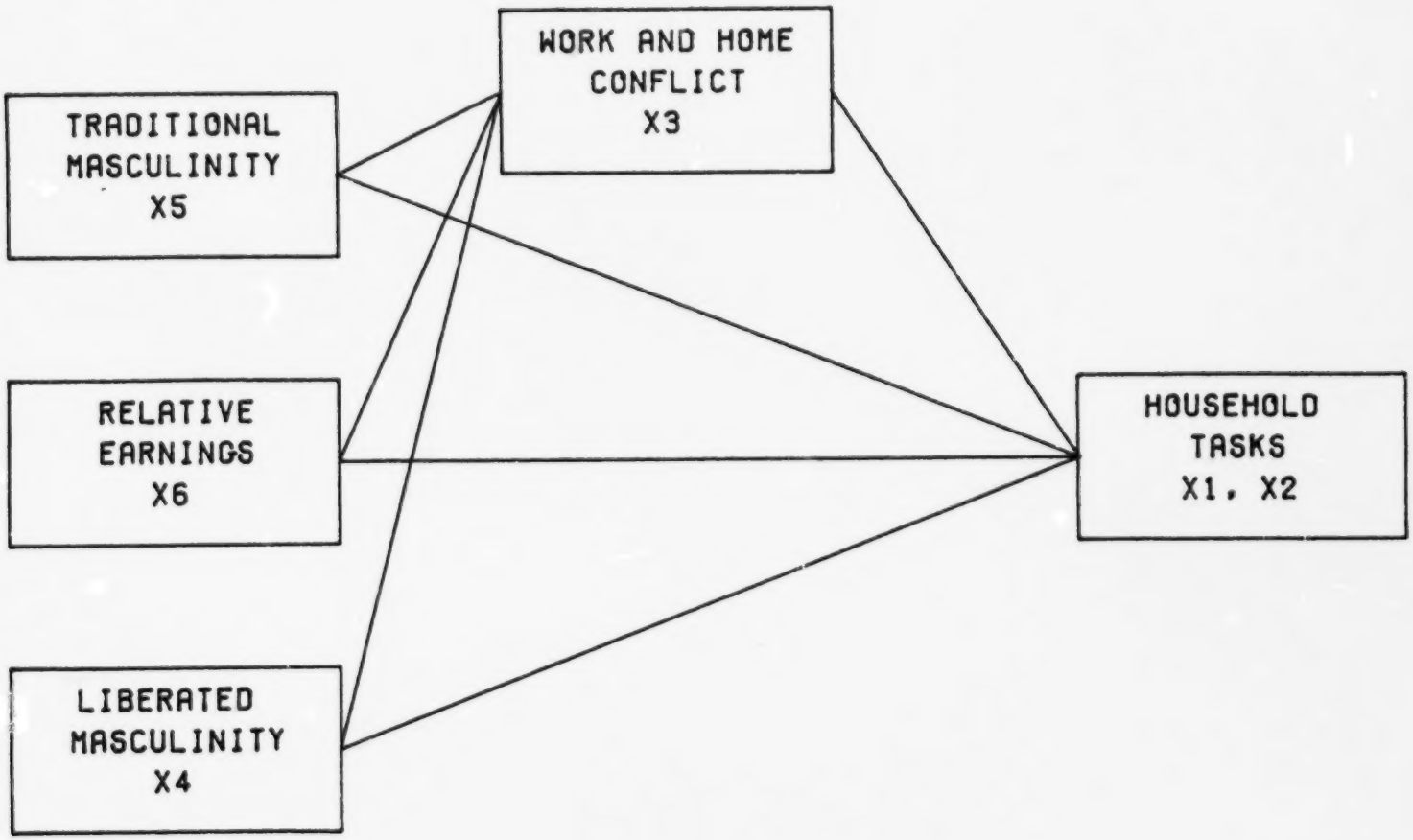

FIG. 1. HYPOTHESIZED PATH MODEL

Three variables had direct effects on the frequency of cooking-related activities and on cleaning. In both cases, wife's relative earnings had the greatest direct effect. The greater the wife's contribution to the total household income, the more likely her husband was to become involved in cooking and cleaning.

Liberated masculinity had the predicted relationship with domestic activities. The more a man subscribed to expressiveness and openness as a masculine style, as well as a willingness to share childcare responsibilities with his spouse, the more frequently he reported doing cooking and cleaning around the house.

Finally, role conflict between occupational and domestic responsibilities had a negative relationship with cooking and cleaning. Men who reported greater difficulties in coordinating their work and home lives tended to show less frequent involvement in domestic chores. This index of role conflict was also an important mediating variable. Both relative income and traditional masculinity significantly influenced perceived role conflict. Looking first at traditionally masculinity, we see that men who emphasized the importance of both interpersonal dominance and all-consuming devotion to one's job tended to report greater difficulty in coordinating work and family responsibilities. This being the case, traditionally masculinity indirectly affected involvement in both cooking ($p_{35}p_{13} = -0.03$) and cleaning ($p_{35}p_{23} = -0.05$). Thus, traditional masculinity suppressed a husband's frequency of carrying out domestic chores only to the extent that he perceived difficulties in coordinating occupational and marital roles.

Problems in coordinating work and marital roles were also influenced by a wife's relative incoem. As we predicted, respondents whose wives earned incomes comparable to their own tended to report fewer difficulties in coordinating occupational and domestic roles.

Both liberated masculinity and role conflcit served as significant mediators for relative income. The combined indirect effect of relative income in predicting frequency of cooking activities was 0.04 which, when added to the direct effect of this variable, gave a total impact of 0.23. Relative income had an indirect effect on cleaning of 0.05, or a total impact of 0.22.

DISCUSSION

A basic hypothesis that a woman's relative earning power in a family would strongly influence the egalitarian distribution of household tasks was supported. The relative contribution of a wife's earnings to total family income was positively related to the frequency with which husbands reported doing cooking, setting the table, washing the dishes and meal preparation activities. A positive relationship for income was also noted for cleaning, sweeping, dusting, and other related chores through its effect on the perceived conflict between occupational responsibilities and home life. The greater a wife's relative income, the lower the perceived conflict between these roles. In turn, the lower the perceived conflict between the two, the more likely a husband was to report involvement in cooking and cleaning. Additional items in the survey were examined in order to interpret this relationship between relative income and role conflict more fully. Respondents whose wives made substantial contributions to total household income tended to report lower personal commitment to their own jobs ($r = -0.15$, $p = 0.05$) while at the same showing greater job satisfaction ($r = 0.21$, $p < .01$). These men also reported a higher standard of living, the greater the wife's relative income ($r = 0.14$, $p < .05$). Finally, relative income was positively related to a high rate of social interaction between husband and wife ($r = 0.29$, $p < .001$), such as going out for an evening together. It appears from this analysis that one way in which men

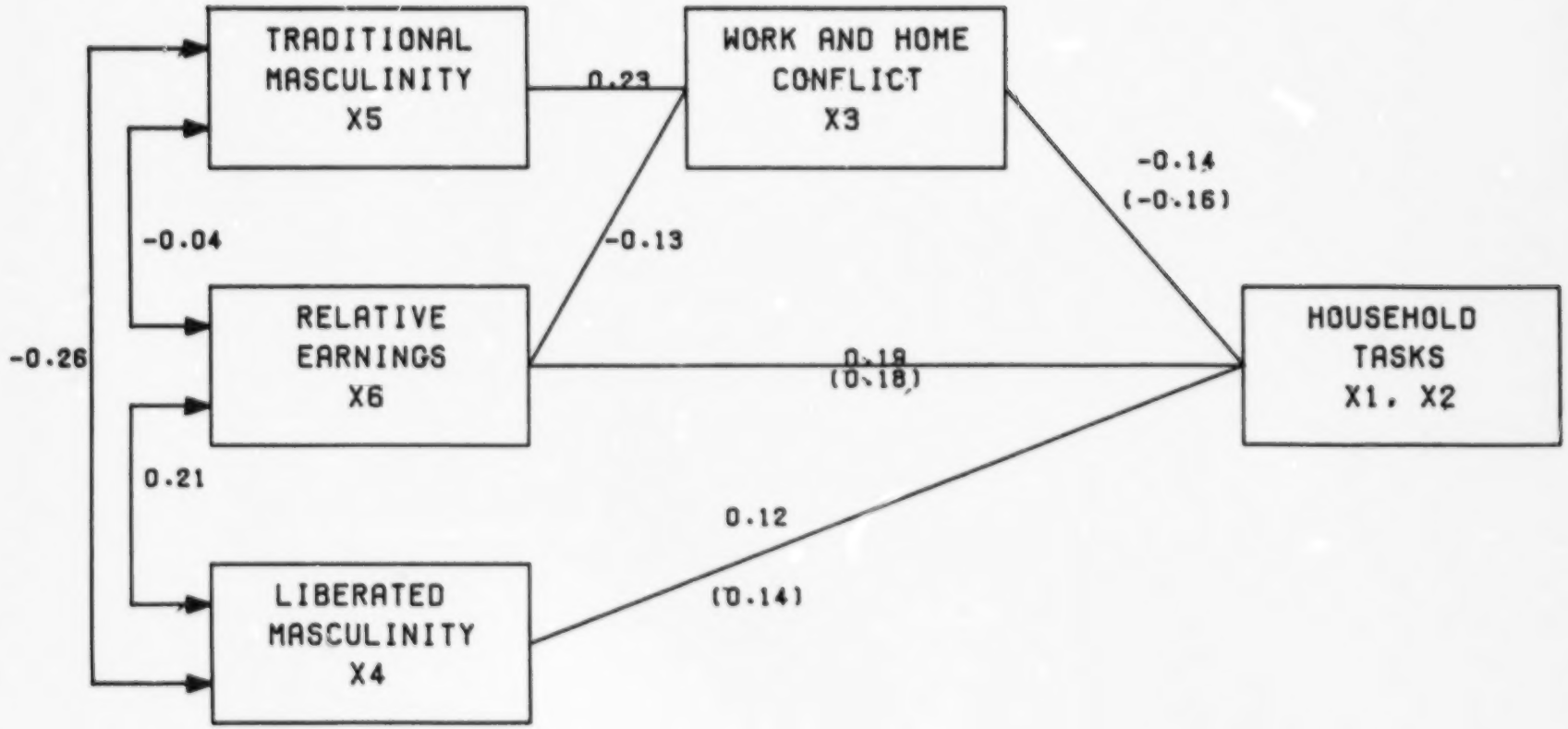

FIG. 2. STATISTICALLY SIGNIFICANT BETA WEIGHTS BRACKETED BETAS ARE FOR CLEANING AND UNBRACKETED ARE FOR COOKING

resolve the conflict between occupation and home life is to decrease their commitment to the job and increase their interest and invovlement in their families. Clearly, the greater the wife's contribution to total family income, the more a husband can afford this shift in priorities. Warren Farrell (1974), among others, has pointed out the advantages to men provided by a spouse who has undertaken a career outside the home. Not only does a working wife lessen a man's responsibility for being the sole breadwinner, it also enables him to have a diversity of recreational interests and to spend more free time with his family. Decreased pressures to perform on the job also serve to make the work intrinsically more interesting to the man. Finally, the fairly strong relationship between wife's relative income and the frequency of occasions that a married couple spends together outside the home indicates that a wife's earnings may contribute to a higher standard of living and more disposable income for recreation.

It was also observed in this study that wife's relative income was also related to husband's liberated masculinity. A wife who contributes a significant amount of the total household income may elicit a masculine orientation from her spouse which incorporates greater expressiveness as well as a willingness to carry out non-traditional roles. It can be argued that masculinity is a product of an ongoing socialization process and, therefore, can undergo change during a marriage. In the absence of longitudinal data to ascertain the actual causal relation between liberated masculnity and wife's relative income, another possibility must be acknowledged. It is highly conceivable that the link between incoem and liberated masculinity is purely correlational, due to the fact that career-oriented women and liberated men may come together and marry because of similar interests, value systems, or activities. Another possibility is that men who are liberated create a very

favorable environment for their wives to pursue a career through their willingness to take over a fair share of child-care and housekeeping responsibilities.

Traditional masculinity did not directly affect involvement in domestic activities. It influenced participaton in cooking and cleaning, indirectly, however, through its impact on perceptions of role conflict. Traditional men tended to experience greater difficulties in coordinating occupational responsibilities and home life. This is to be expected, given the emphasis placed on work. Nor did a working wife seem to have much impact on these men since there was only a slight negative correlation between relative income and traditional masculinity.

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